

THE SAMMI PROJECT

Educators Guide

A resource for reading, thinking,
asking better questions and developing Critical Economic Literacy

“Every child deserves the chance to imagine a different world —
not just inherit the one we hand them.”

About This Guide

The Sammi Project is not a book with a fixed ending — and this guide doesn't have fixed answers. It is designed to help parents, caregivers, and educators use the story of Luke and Sammi as a starting point for some of the most important conversations children can have: about what we value, how we decide, and who gets to say what something — or someone — is worth.

The questions in this guide are invitations, not tests. There are no right answers. The goal is simply to think together.

① The Story at a Glance

Characters

Luke — a thoughtful, caring boy navigating a difficult time

Sammi — a scruffy rescue dog with one cloudy eye and a weak wag that changes everything

Mr. Neo — a well-dressed businessman who sees Sammi as an asset, not a friend

Luke's parents — caring but under real financial pressure

Setting

A quiet neighbourhood. A family home. A park. Ordinary places where extraordinary questions arise.

The Story Arc

1. Luke is lonely and isolated — the world feels wrong
2. His parents bring home Sammi, a rescue dog, as a surprise
3. Sammi is frightened; Luke is patient. They heal each other
4. A stranger, Mr. Neo, offers \$500 to buy Sammi
5. Luke refuses. Mr. Neo returns: \$700. Then \$1,000
6. That night, Luke hears his dad has lost his job
7. Luke faces an impossible question: loyalty or survival?
8. The book stops — and hands the ending to the reader

The Central Question

When Mr. Neo offers \$1,000 for Sammi — enough to help Luke’s family pay bills and buy groceries — Luke doesn’t know what to do. The book stops here and asks the reader:

“What would you do?”

This is not a trick question. Both choices are defensible. This is genuine inquiry.

② What This Book Is Really About

On the surface, *The Sammi Project* is a story about a boy and his dog. But underneath, it is a story about economics — in the most human sense of the word. It asks children to grapple with questions that adults spend careers trying to answer:

What the story explores

- How do we decide what something is worth?
- Is the market always the right measure of value?
- Is money the solution to all our problems?
- What happens when love and money pull in opposite directions?
- Why do some people see the world as a series of transactions?
- Can a child change anything — or does the world just happen to them?

The big idea

Mr. Neo isn’t necessarily a villain. He’s a very good student of the neoliberal world as it currently works. He has learned — as so many of us have — to see everything through the lens of profit, return on investment and transaction.

Luke already knows, before he can explain it, that something is wrong with Mr. Neo’s logic. That knowing is the beginning of what we call critical economic literacy.

A note on neoliberalism

The business card Mr. Neo hands Luke reads: “Neo Liber Business Solutions: A Good Life is a Rich Life.” This is not accidental. The book is a gentle, age-appropriate introduction to the idea that we live inside a set of stories about value, scarcity, and success that are perpetuated by neoliberal ideas and that we can choose to question those stories.

This is Critical Economic Literacy (CEL): the ability to identify, analyse, and reflexively question economic models and stories in order to address the power imbalances in our world. The Sammi Project is CEL for ages 6–10.

③ Before You Read

These warm-up questions help children connect their own experience to the story before it begins. They work equally well as a classroom opening activity or a bedtime conversation starter.

Have you ever had something — or someone — that you loved so much you couldn’t imagine giving it up? What made it so special?

If someone offered you a lot of money for your favourite thing in the world, what would you do?

Have you ever had someone tell you something that sounds right to your head but yet it felt wrong in your heart? What did you do then?

What does it mean to help someone? Is giving money the best way to help someone?

④ While You Read — Page by Page Prompts

These questions can be asked during a read-aloud to pause and think together. Not all questions suit every child — choose the ones that feel right.

When Sammi first arrives

The text says Sammi ‘looked up at Luke with her good eye.’ What do you think happened to her other eye? What kind of life do you think she had before?

Luke smiled for the first time in weeks. Why do you think Sammi made him feel better when nothing else had?

When Mr. Neo first appears

Mr. Neo says ‘What a beautiful dog!’ but then immediately offers to buy her. What does that tell you about how he thinks?

His business card says ‘A Good Life is a Rich Life.’ Do you agree? What would you put on your business card?

When Mr. Neo keeps coming back

Mr. Neo offers more and more money each time. Why do you think he does that? What does it tell us about how he sees Sammi?

Luke says ‘She’s not for sale’ — but then his dad loses his job. Does that change things? Should it?

The night Luke can’t sleep

Luke thinks about what \$1,000 could mean for his family — groceries, rent, bills. Is he being selfish for not wanting to sell Sammi, or is he being responsible for wanting to? Can he be both?

He asks Sammi: ‘If selling you could help Mum and Dad, should I do it?’ What do you think Sammi would say if she could answer?

⑤ The Create Your Ending Moment

When the book reaches page 35, it stops and hands the story to the child. This is the heart of The Sammi Project. Here’s how to make the most of it.

Step 1 — Give them space

Before discussing anything, let the child sit with the question. The discomfort of not knowing is the most valuable part. Resist the urge to suggest or guide. Let them draw or write their ending first.

Step 2 — Ask, don’t tell

Once they have drawn or written their ending, ask:

Why did you choose that ending?

How did it feel to decide?

Is there another ending you almost chose? Why didn't you?

Step 3 — Share it

The QR code on page 38 invites children to share their ending online and see what other children decided. This transforms a private reading moment into a community conversation — and shows children that their thinking matters beyond the living room or classroom.

The only picture to share will be the child's drawing, their first name and the country they are resident in. Please do not submit any pictures with identifiable details. The collection and use of these are compliant to the regulations set by Singapore PDPA (2021).

⑥ After You Read

These questions work best after the book is closed and the child has had time to sit with their ending. They move from the story toward the wider world.

About value and worth

Mr. Neo says Sammi would be 'better off' with him — fancier food, bigger yard. Do you think that's true? Can you buy a good life for someone?

Can you think of something in your own life that no amount of money could replace? What makes it impossible to put a price on?

Who gets to decide what something — or someone — is worth?

Going deeper

Mr. Neo sees Sammi and immediately thinks: how much is she worth? Where do you think he learned to think that way? Did someone teach him — or did the world teach him?

What if the story were different — what if Luke's family had plenty of money? Would Mr. Neo's offer even be tempting then? What does that tell us?

What if it's not just a dog, but our environment — forests, water, air? Our history and culture? Who decides what those are worth?

Why do you think the book is called The Sammi Project? What is the ‘project’?

⑦ Classroom Activities

These activities extend the book into structured learning. They are designed for ages 6–10 but can be adapted up or down.

Activity 1 — The Value Spectrum (20 mins, ages 7+)

What you need

- A long piece of string or tape on the floor
- Cards with: Sammi, \$1,000 cash, friendship, a house, clean water, your favourite book, fresh air, a gold medal

How it works

Label one end of the string ‘Can be bought and sold’ and the other end ‘Cannot be bought or sold.’ Ask children to place each card somewhere on the spectrum and explain why. There are no wrong answers — the discussion is the point.

The key question

What makes something moveable on this spectrum? What would have to change about the world for everything to sit at the ‘cannot be bought’ end?

Activity 2 — Mr. Neo’s Business Card (25 mins, ages 8+)

What you need

- Blank index cards
- Coloured pens

How it works

Mr. Neo’s card says: ‘A Good Life is a Rich Life.’ Ask each child to design their own business card with their own definition of a good life. Share and compare. What values come up most? What’s missing from Mr. Neo’s version?

Extension

Ask: if the world was run by your definition of a good life instead of Mr. Neo’s, what would be different?

Activity 3 — The Endings Gallery (30 mins, all ages)

How it works

After every child has drawn their ending, create a gallery wall. Ask each child to do a ‘gallery walk’ and leave a sticky note on three endings that surprised them.

Debrief questions

- What surprised you about other people’s choices?
- Did seeing other endings change how you feel about yours?
- Was there a ‘popular’ ending? Does that mean it’s right?

Activity 4 — The DISRUPT Thinking Routine (40 mins, ages 9+)

This activity uses the DISRUPT framework developed by Dr. Catherine Ho and her research and development of Critical Economic Literacy. It helps older children examine Mr. Neo’s worldview systematically.

Apply each lens to Mr. Neo’s belief: ‘A Good Life is a Rich Life’

D — Definition: What does ‘rich’ mean? What does ‘good’ mean? Are they the same?

I — Incoherence: Where does this idea break down or contradict itself?

S — Silver Bullet: Does money solve every problem? Can you think of a problem it can’t fix?

R — Refutation: What evidence argues against this idea?

U — Unintended Consequences: What happens to a world where everyone thinks like Mr. Neo?

P — Positionality: Who benefits from this idea? Who doesn’t?

T — Theory’s Assumptions: What does this idea assume about human nature and what people really need?

⑧ Curriculum Links

The Sammi Project supports learning outcomes across multiple subject areas and frameworks.

Area	Connections
English / ELA	Reading comprehension, character motivation, narrative structure, point of view, persuasive language (Mr. Neo), creative writing (the ending)
Social Studies / HSSE	Economic concepts (price, value, scarcity, trade-offs), community and family, decision-making, civic responsibility

PSHE / SEL	Empathy, emotional regulation, values clarification, resilience, ethical reasoning, friendship and loyalty
Global Citizenship	Power and inequality, who decides value, questioning dominant narratives, taking action, agency
Philosophy for Children (P4C)	Is something worth what someone will pay for it? Can love be measured? What makes a good life?
IB PYP / MYP	Transdisciplinary themes: How We Organise Ourselves, Sharing the Planet. Learner profile: Thinker, Principled, Open-minded

About the Author

Dr. Catherine Ho is an economist, educator, and the founder of Wonder:education reimagined — a Singapore-registered social enterprise working at the intersection of critical thinking and global citizenship education. Her doctoral research at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign developed the framework of Critical Economic Literacy, which underpins everything in this book.

www.wonder-educationreimagined.org

A better and more peaceful world... starts with a little Wonder

Acknowledgement: This guide was co-written with Claude AI; CEL, stories and characters originate from the author.
